

**A CASE STUDY FROM THE HELLENIC RED CROSS:**

**"IMPLEMENTING COMMUNITY  
ENGAGEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY  
(CEA) IN ACCOMMODATION CENTRES  
FOR UNACCOMPANIED YOUNG  
PEOPLE"**



# CONTEXT

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# INTRODUCTION



Over the past five years, Hellenic Red Cross has been institutionalising Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA), with the majority of the programs and services now aligned with the CEA Standard Operating Procedures, ensuring quality and accountability at every stage.

This case study illustrates and explains how the CEA approach has been integrated into the Hellenic Red Cross Society's work in Accommodation Centres for unaccompanied young people. We hope capturing this will also provide some inspiration for others implementing similar projects.

CEA best practices and approaches which have been implemented successfully are presented here through brief interviews and illustrative images.

This case study provides evidence of CEA's contribution to better, more effective programs, prioritising people's specific needs and preferences.



## ABOUT THE ACCOMMODATION CENTRES

The Accommodation Centres (AC) provide place for young people seeking asylum in Greece to stay while they wait for their asylum cases to be finalized by the state.

The aim of the Accommodation Centres is to provide a safe environment for the young people living there and to support their educational, personal and emotional development towards adulthood.

To help achieve this, a personal action plan is developed for each resident, put together in collaboration between the resident themselves and the Centre's own technical team.

The Centres seek to treat all residents with dignity and respect, with equality of opportunity and support provided, through a variety of services.

Hellenic Red Cross operates five Accommodation Centres for unaccompanied young people in Athens (3), Volos (1) and Kalavryta (1). Two of the centres in Athens have been operating since September 2017, while those in Volos, Kalavryta and one shelter in Athens, began functioning in 2019. The majority of the young people living in the centres are from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, Somalia, Egypt and Bangladesh.

In total, 154 young people, aged between 12-18 years old can be accommodated in the Centres.

The interdisciplinary team working in each centre is composed of social workers, psychologists, caregivers, admin officers, interpreters, legal advisors, school teachers and nutritionists.



The Accommodation Centres offer the following services:

- Accommodation
- Catering
- Distribution of clothes and hygiene items
- Access to preventative and emergency health care
- Psychosocial support
- Counselling/Legal Advice
- Tutoring on Greek language and integration into the Greek educational system
- Interpretation

➔ *"CEA in the Accommodation Centres has been identified as a cross-cutting approach since 2019 and includes a set of tools and procedures, which ensure that services prioritise to the young peoples needs and preferences. CEA is considered as a mindset that improves the program's effectiveness and sustainability by building relationships of mutual trust between the young people and the staff."*

# PROVIDING TIMELY AND ACCURATE INFORMATION



✓ Taking into account the needs and preferences of young residents at the centres, face-to-face communication and the use of printed materials are the main channels used to share information about issues that interest them.

✓ Daily two-way communication promotes familiarity, cooperation and acceptance between staff and residents.



Information boards, AC C Athens



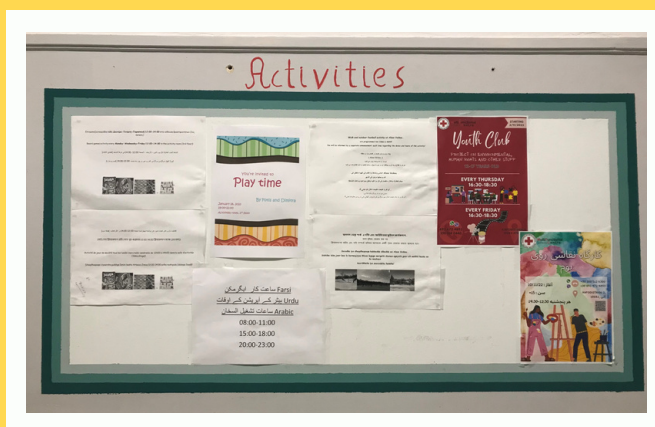
Face-to-face communication, AC A Athens



Face-to-face communication, AC Volos

✓ The content provided on information boards is translated to ensure all residents can access the information, which is also updated on a regular basis.

The main concept is to provide timely, relevant and reliable information according to the residents' needs and interests.

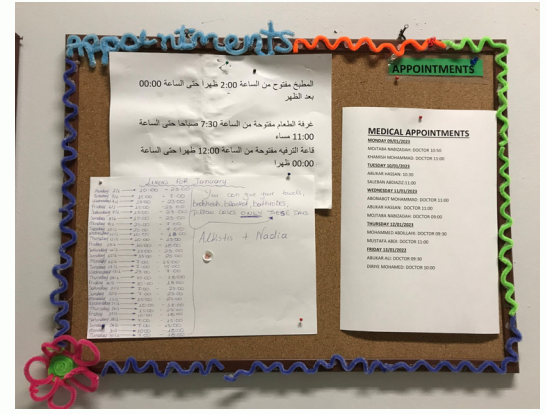


Information board, AC A Athens

✓ The information provided includes comprehensive and easy-to-understand information with summaries to emphasise the key points, while the layout of announcements and posters is designed in a way (little text, more images) that is both visually appealing and simple to understand.

# BEST PRACTICES IN PROVIDING RELIABLE INFORMATION

## "Self-made information boards"



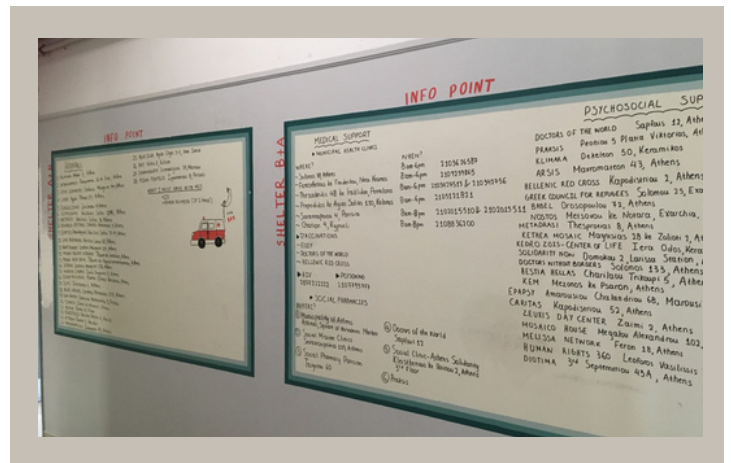
"The purpose of this idea was to work together with young people to create info boards in every language of the people living in the centre. That way, people can be informed about important topics - all through an idea and a tool that was in fact their idea."

Nadia Dailiana, Caregiver, AC B Athens

## "Drawing info boards onto the walls"

"We were thinking that we had to find a creative and a resourceful way to attract people's attention regarding information that could be useful to them. So, we thought about painting the info boards on the wall, making the messages more attractive to read and make use of."

Andreas Livas, Caregiver, AC C Athens



FGD, AC C Athens

## "Focus group discussions"

✓ Focus group discussions (FGD's) are the most common method of sharing timely and relevant information with young people while at the same time facilitating the collection of useful feedback.

The FGD's take place quite often in the Centres, separately for each nationality and always with the presence of an interpreter. The main topics that are discussed are:

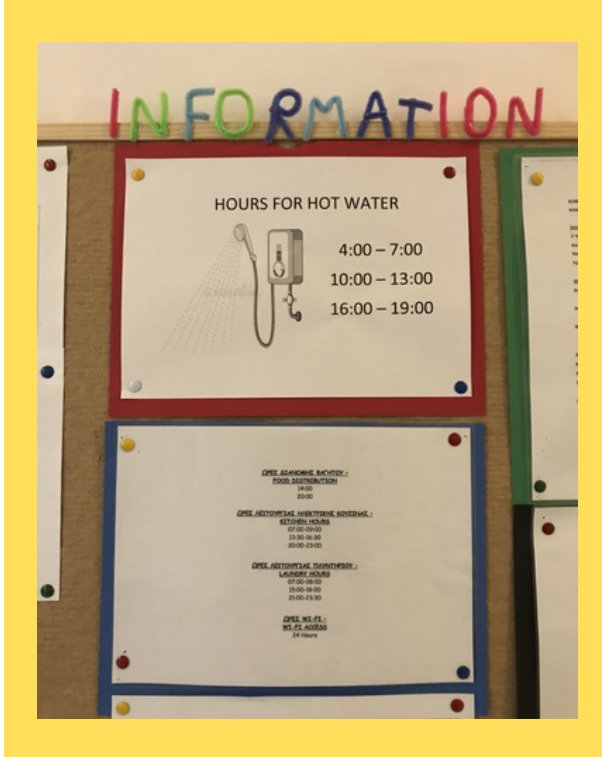
- ➡ Updates for the upcoming activities
- ➡ Announcements for everyday operational issues
- ➡ Discussions to manage disagreements, complaints, expectations, negative behaviors



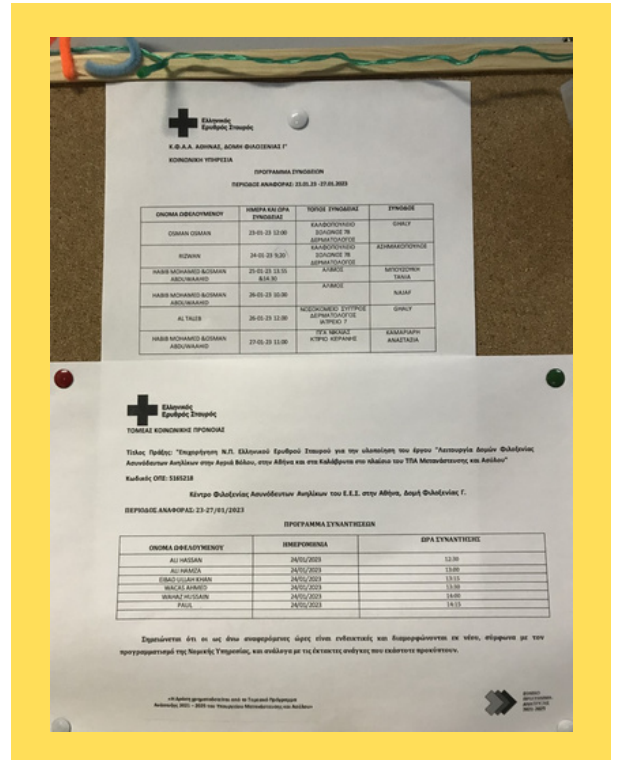
FGD, AC B Athens

## "Observation"

- ✓ Everyday engagement and interactive dialogue is one of the most useful approaches for accommodation centre staff. Taking time each day to understand resident's feelings, behaviours, and attitudes contributes to positively and proactively addressing informational and other needs.



Information about operating hours of the washing facilities, AC B Athens



Information about medical appointments, AC C Athens

- ✓ For instance, caregivers in Accommodation Centres B & C Athens, found that young people repeatedly asked about medical and legal appointments and the schedule of internal services (e.g when to switch on the boiler, when and how to use the washing machines, etc.)

- ✓ The team thought that it would be a helpful solution to make this information available in printed form. Posters and announcements were posted on the information boards and combined together with face-to-face discussions helped ensure young people had the basic information they needed.



Breakfast, AC B Athens

## "Interactive communication"

- ✓ Everyday interaction and engagement with residents is the key for staff in Accommodation Centre B Athens - including for sharing the importance of a healthy breakfast.

Through open dialogue and face-to-face communication staff were able to successfully encourage increased consumption of healthier foods, fresh fruits and vegetables.

# ENSURING PARTICIPATION

✓ All the recreational and educational activities are designed and implemented in cooperation with the young residents, after receiving their feedback and ensuring their consent and agreement.

✓ Centre staff acknowledged the need to engage residents throughout the cycle of delivering programmes and activities: from the design stage, during the activity and when evaluating its impact. Ensuring residents' participation in every activity contributes to:

- ➡ establishing relationships of mutual trust and respect between young residents and staff
- ➡ activities which are relevant to people's needs and preferences
- ➡ ensures a high level of commitment and participation, since young people have a sense of ownership and are invested in activities

- ➡ increasing the positive impact of activities
- ➡ enhanced cooperation and acceptance, and improves communication between staff and young people, since they feel that their opinions and suggestions are valued and matter

# BEST PRACTICES IN ENSURING PARTICIPATION

## "The kitchen project"

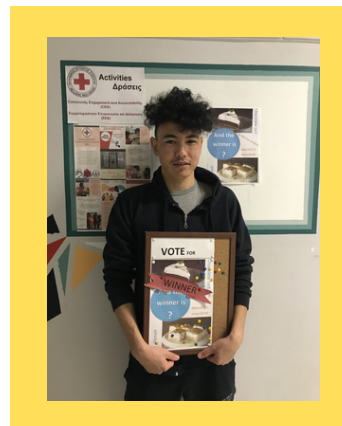
✓ In Accommodation Centre A Athens the "The Kitchen project" activity has been implemented with the use of CEA tools:



"Voting"



"Counting the votes"



"Announcing the results"



"Conducting the activity"

### a) Questionnaires through kobotool or printed forms:

Firstly the residents were asked what kind and type of activity they would like to be involved in, what they would find interesting and useful and how they would like the activity to take place (e.g in groups or individually.)

### b) Feedback through suggestion box:

Next, the residents voted on which proposed activity they would prefer.

### c) Communicating the survey results:

A committee of residents counted the votes and posted the results in the information boards.

### d) Implementation:

Finally, the activity took place with full participation and commitment from the young residents, who had been engaged from the very beginning and were able to see the activity through to its successful conclusion.





"This is your time", AC C Athens

## "This is your time!"

✓ The activity "This is your time" which took place in Accommodation Centre C Athens was based around the core components of CEA itself: "Young people are at the centre of the decisions that affect them".

Once a month, residents sit together with staff and discuss what kind of activities they would like to take part in over the following weeks. Once they agree an activity, they evaluate the process: *Did they enjoy the dialogue? Did they find it difficult to respect the each other's opinions? Why an activity is affordable and another one is not? What are the benefits of the activity? Who will do what, when and how?*

This particular activity not only gives young people the opportunity to decide for themselves what they like or don't like, but also sets up the next steps to enable the activity's successful delivery. The participatory approach enhances the feelings of responsibility and commitment to implementing an activity that the young people fully own and support.

## "Movie night"



"Last week the staff asked us, what kind of movie we'd like to watch. We suggested a football match instead of a movie, since this is what we enjoy the most."

Ahmend, Minor, AC B Athens

## "The value of participation"

✓ All the recreational, educational and psychosocial activities are the result of suggestions, ideas and choices from the residents themselves.

It is very important that the young people understand and recognise that the activities are for them and they have control over what activities are organised and how they take place.

As part of this, it is crucial to provide accurate and clear information on each activity's purpose and goals and ensure buy-in by building the activities together with the young people.

## "Theatrical game"



"It was a big surprise for us that all the young people wanted to participate to this activity. Of course, this was a result from the fact that the particular activity was their idea!"

Adam Chafez, Caregiver, AC B Athens

## "Excursion to the snow"



"Thanks to CEA the activities organised are more creative, relevant and fit better with what young people want and need."

Galatia Papaonisiforou, Social worker, AC Kalavryta

## "Gardening lessons"



"We asked the young people what they'd like to learn about and they told us: "how to build a garden". So, we bought the equipment and we started gardening lessons!"

Vasilis Vlachakis, School teacher, AC Volos

### "Tinkering"



*"Integrating CEA approaches in our activities, helps us to provide activities tailored to young peoples needs and preferences. It also helps develop a sense of independence and agency that is invaluable as these young people grow towards adulthood."*

*Galatia Papaonisiforou, Social worker, AC Kalavrita*

### "Polo tournament"



*"We asked residents to choose which sport activity they'd like to attend. The majority chose water polo, so that's what we were to see".*

*Anthi Matzara, AC Volos Coordinator*

### "Excursion to Milies"



*"When we open ourselves to allowing residents to propose and choose the activities they feel are best for them, they own their decisions and that helps increase the positive impact."*

*Anthi Matzara, AC Volos Coordinator*

### "Professional orientation seminar"



*"For us, CEA is a way of thinking that enables us to be closer with the young people we work with, and build mutual trust and respect. We have acknowledged the need to engage the young people we work with in everything we do, to ask them what they think, if they agree or not, and always explain clearly and openly what we can and cannot provide. Our ultimate goal, through this way of working is to ensure we allow them to be genuine active partners and not passive recipients of a program that we have decided for them. In that way we achieve the best positive impact we can."*

*Vasilis Vlachakis, School teacher, AC Volos*

## CEA IN PROMOTING POSITIVE BEHAVIORS

✓ The tools and techniques of the CEA approach are used to promote positive behaviors and practices that contribute to the healthy physical, psychological and social development of the young residents.

Two-way communication, participatory activities, and relationships of trust and acceptance are key.

Residents' often difficult backgrounds, life-experiences and cultural differences within the group, mean staff need to be empathetic and aware at all times, and ensure potential challenges are taken into account.

Working together to design and tailor activities is itself an important and inspiring process, developing young people's skills and building trust with staff. That it also leads to activities that better fit residents needs and preferences makes this approach doubly valuable.

## "Let's swap"



✓ The "Let's swap" activity was an initiative of the Accommodation Centre C Athens aiming to help young people access a change of wardrobe, while at the same time helping to break down stigma attached to wearing second-hand clothes.

A bazaar of second-hand clothes was organized, where young people had the opportunity to exchange the clothes they didn't wear anymore. The activity was also supported by discussion sessions on the practical and ecological benefits of reusing and recycling clothing.

In the evaluation of the activity, the residents who took part said that they really enjoyed it and requested it to be repeated.

"Let's swap" was based on the CEA approach:

- ➡ Sustainable change in behaviors cannot be imposed but has to be the result of free, informed choice
- ➡ This approach to behavior change can be a long process that requires time and effort

➡ The promotion of positive social behaviors relies on continuous open dialogue, participatory activities, and two-way communication

➡ Regular feedback collection is also an integral part of the behavior change process, helping gauge and understand perceptions, attitudes, and practices throughout

## RECEIVING FEEDBACK FROM YOUNG PEOPLE

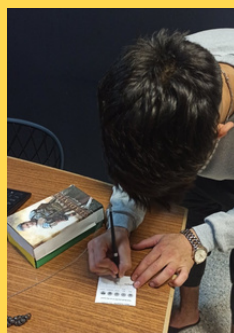
✓ Residents are able to share their feedback through multiple channels on a daily basis.

The feedback system is based on the principles of inclusion for all, and ensuring every person has the right and opportunity to express their opinion, thoughts, suggestions or complaints.

Feedback methods are tailored to cultural and language preferences, and also based on preferences of different age groups, ensuring equal participation and access.

Daily interaction and communication between residents and staff contributes to building and maintaining relationships of trust, and enables open dialogue of honest and clear communication.

Open two-way communication also helps to identify and anticipate potential conflicts and misunderstandings that may arise and facilitates their resolution before they escalate.



# BEST PRACTICES IN FEEDBACK COLLECTION

✓ To ensure feedback is consistently recorded and taken into consideration, staff created a form to systematically capture the key issues, main topics and recommended actions discussed during focus group discussion meetings.

By systematically recording the discussion points, the form supports staff to follow up on actions, and check whether issues have been resolved.

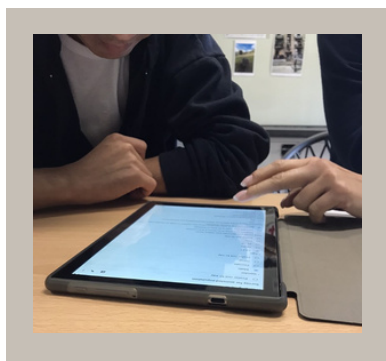
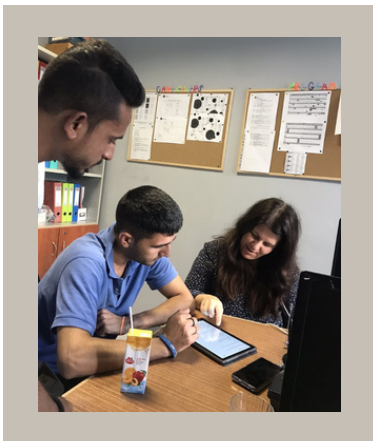
"Recording minutes when we conduct a FGD is really useful for us. Not only does it help track progress on solving key issues but at the same time actively and practically demonstrates that we really care and take into account what people are telling us".

Evangelia Karlatira, Psychologist, AC C Athens

## "Focus Group Discussion form"

FGD form

## "Conducting surveys"



✓ Both electronic Kobo and printed survey forms are used to collect feedback on specific topics and activities.

For example, a survey was conducted in 2021 regarding perceptions towards Covid-19. In 2022 surveys evaluating the quality of services and residents' satisfaction were regularly carried out to monitor performance and inform adaption of activities and services.

"When we ask a young person's opinion on an issue, we make sure that we are creative to ensure our approach to seek feedback is something they are interested in engaging with. In other words, we adapt the CEA tools to try to match the interests of who we are engaging with."

Evangelia Karlatira, Psychologist, AC C Athens



✓ Back in 2021 the staff of Accommodation Centre C in Athens conducted a short survey to assess which topics the young residents were most interested in. The results indicated that the main issue of concern was the desire for clear information about asylum application and decision making procedures in Greece.

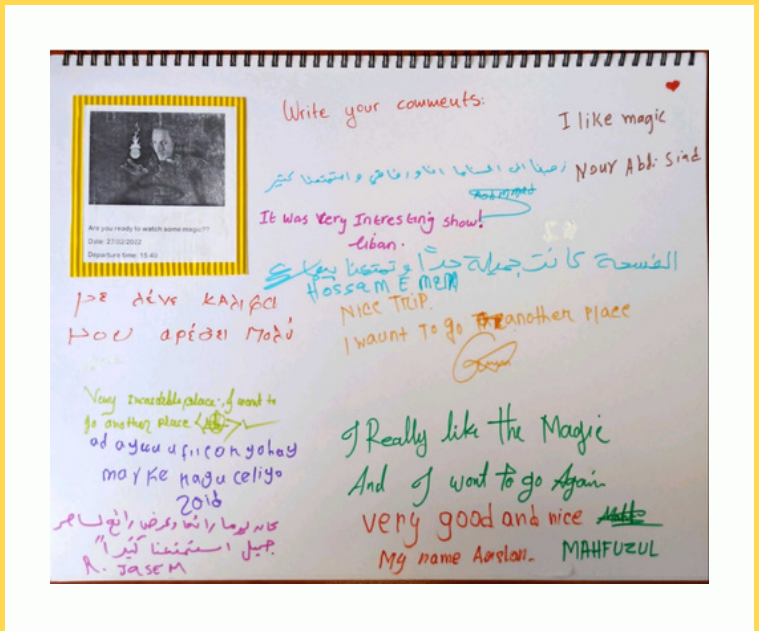
Following up on the feedback received, with the support of legal advisors staff set up additional face-to-face information sessions and focus group discussions about legal and asylum issues young people were facing. In parallel, links to reliable webpages containing useful information on legal and asylum issues were also shared.

✓ In Accommodation Centre C in Athens, another creative method was adopted to help enable the young people to share their thoughts, feelings and opinions in response to activities like visits to museums, theatres, and live performances.

Young people who had attended these activities were offered the chance to anonymously write down or draw, whatever they wanted to share regarding the experience (emotions, suggestions, complaints, ideas for future activities e.t.c.)

Although there was the option to remain anonymous, the majority of participants included their names alongside their comments, something that was taken by the team as an indication of people's high level of satisfaction with the activities.

### "Feedback through drawing"



### "Video through Kobotool"



✓ In 2022, staff of Accommodation Centre B in Athens, used the video feature in KoBo to collect feedback from participants after a cooking activity. This was the first time Hellenic Red Cross had used the video feature for this purpose.

The initiative came about after recognising the group's familiarity with social media and video-editing applications, like tiktok and youtube.

The "live interviews" recorded proved an extremely popular way to give feedback, which participants found an engaging and fun way to express themselves and share their thoughts.

## "Closing the feedback loop"

✓ To support accountability, transparency and consistency, staff regularly share feedback they receive with residents of their respective accommodation centres.

Sharing the key issues raised in the feedback received, not only openly demonstrates an awareness of the issues people are raising and reinforces that residents' concerns matter and are taken into account, but also provides an opportunity to discuss ideas for next steps and also to explain why some actions and requests may not be possible.



Announcing the results for the activity "Movie night", AC C Athens



Announcing CEA Activities, AC C Athens



Announcing the results for the activity "The Kitchen project", AC A Athens

"It is very important to share feedback with the young residents. We show them that we are not asking their opinion for no reason, but we really care and value what they have to share with us."

Roula Ermini, Caregiver, AC Kalavryta

"We have to be really careful when it comes to managing expectations. We make sure to explain and be clear about the limits of what we can and can't do."

"Responding to feedback and communicating in an honest and respectful way, helps to manage feelings of dissatisfaction and helps avoid losing trust."

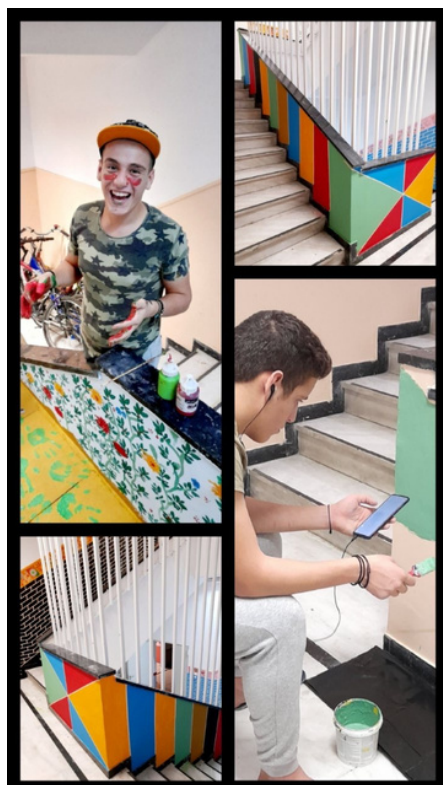
Spyridoula Syrrou, AC C Athens Coordinator

# IMPACT OF CEA

Integration of the CEA approach and maintenance of the CEA Standard Operating Procedures, has so far contributed to:

➡ Supporting residents' sense of independence and self-sufficiency

- ➡ The timely management of rumors that could have a negative impact on residents' wellbeing, and life in the accommodation centres generally
- ➡ The establishment of mutual trusted relationships between young people and staff
- ➡ The timely management of tensions and disagreements
- ➡ Strengthening the personal development of young people in the centres, helping prepare them for an independent and self-reliant adult life
- ➡ Promoting positive behaviours and healthy practices

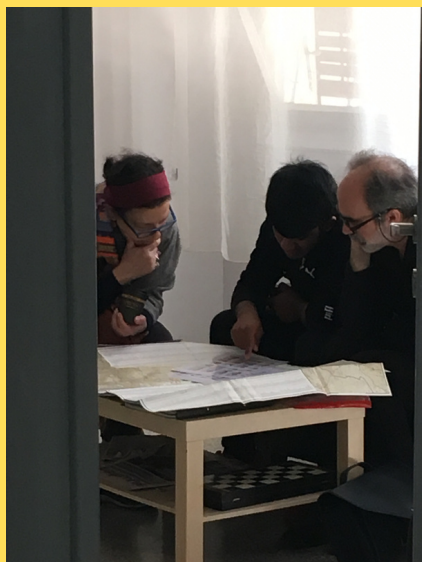


*"In order to ensure the full integration of the CEA approach in the AC's from October 2022, a Community Engagement and Accountability Focal Person has been appointed and is responsible for promoting CEA in all the Accommodation Centres."*



*"Daily engagement with the young people here allows us not only to have a more complete picture of their needs, but also helps us address potential problems as soon as they arise. Asking for feedback and taking into account every single comment, suggestion or complaint, strengthens the feeling of trust between us and helps us to maintain interactive communication."*

Laura Spyropoulou, Caregiver, AC C Athens



*"By ensuring we see and work with residents as partners and include them in decision making, CEA helps us to ensure the quality and the effectiveness of what we do. It's in our mandate to engage the young people here in everything we do - this is the only way forward if we want to succeed in building relationships of mutual respect, acceptance and solidarity. Giving power to residents to decide what they want and what they believe is best for them, helps reinforce feelings of personal responsibility and independence which will be crucial for them as they become adults."*

Maria Rouvali, Caregiver, CEA AC's Focal Person

## CHALLENGES

➡ The lack of interpreters in specific languages, e.g. Somali, can undermine the effectiveness of activities (e.g. not possible to carry out FGD's with young Somalis without a Somali interpreter.)

➡ To ensure and enable participation of all young residents, it is important to be flexible, creative and empathetic, to take into account the difficult backgrounds and life-experiences many have faced.

## NEXT STEPS

➡ The CEA Focal Person is in the process of building a network that will include focal points from all the Accommodation Centres to exchange best practices, new suggestions and ideas, and common challenges.

➡ The CEA team is working on standardizing the CEA approach so all the accommodation centre teams achieve the same level of CEA (though sensitization sessions, use of relevant tools and methodologies e.t.c.)





**More information:**

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